

October 24, 2012

To: Dan Ray and Cindy Messer, Delta Stewardship Council  
From: Charles Gardiner, Delta Vision Foundation  
Re: Near-term Strategies for Implementation of the Delta Plan  
Cc: Sunne Wright McPeak, Jonas Minton, Jason Peltier, Tom Zuckerman, Roger Patterson, Greg Gartrell, Doug Brown

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The following are initial comments from the Delta Vision Foundation on the staff memorandum regarding Near-term Strategies for Implementation of the Delta Plan.

## Near-term Strategies

### Objectives

An additional objective is to build capacity within State, Federal, and stakeholder organizations for implementing projects and actions. There have been more than 30 years of Delta planning, but limited project implementation. Institutions lack the skills, capacity, and resources for implementing projects. The commonly accepted view is that water management and ecosystem restoration projects take 20 years to implement. Given the urgency of problems in the Delta, Delta cannot survive, and the people of California will not tolerate, implementation on that timescale. Governance is only part of this challenge. Near-term actions must be a proving ground for different, in some cases innovative, implementation strategies.

### Guiding Principles

Principle 1 should include the concept of integrated, multi-benefit actions. That is, projects that achieve water supply reliability and ecosystem protection/restoration should be prioritized (see discussion below regarding water supply reliability).

The implementation capacity concept described above should be incorporated into these draft principles.

The language regarding “no regrets” should be refined and broadened beyond BDCP. The Delta Projects Coalition used the following criterion: “Projects that are ‘no risk or low risk for any regrets’ and do not prejudice the outcome of BDCP or the Delta Plan.” The Central Valley Flood Protection Plan and State Water Resources Control Board Bay-Delta Plan could be added to this concept.

## Proposed Near-term Strategies

### Improve the Reliability of California’s Water Supplies

Missing from the discussion of strategies is the concept of capturing more water in wet years and using less from the Delta watershed in dry years. This overarching concept is an example of a strategy that integrates the Two Co-Equal Goals to achieve multiple benefits. This strategy is supported by all spectrums of the Delta debate and therefore reduces the conflict and controversy surrounding “reduce reliance on the Delta.” The “More in Wet and Less in Dry” strategy fosters an integrated discussion of near-term water management actions that would achieve the Two Co-Equal Goals, such as improved Delta water quality, through-Delta conveyance, storage, groundwater management, conservation, recycling, and other actions.

### **Restore the Delta Ecosystem**

This strategy appears to lack a strategy for important near-term actions that could improve fish protection and reduce conflicts in the existing water conveyance system. Physical or operational changes to the through-Delta conveyance system have been proposed in the past and shown promise (although admittedly some are complex). For example, actions to improve fish protection and migration corridors (fish barriers and screens) and conveyance capacity (dredging) could serve to reduce impacts to protected species. These promising ideas have been largely ignored (lack of leadership and funding) in favor of long-term planning or they have stalled due to opposition by a single interest. The simple question of “what would we do to protect fish in the existing water conveyance systems?” is not being asked or addressed in the near-term (except through operational restrictions imposed by the court).

### **Protect the Delta as Place**

The Lower San Joaquin River Flood Bypass appears to be a specific project, rather than a strategy for improving flood management (and ecosystem restoration) in the Lower San Joaquin River.

### **Coordinate Delta Activities**

This strategy should include a specific strategy for implementing near-term performance measures. These measures should establish aggressive implementation targets and milestones as well as expected results and outcomes. Performance management is an overarching approach that should guide the Implementation Committee, consistency with the Delta Plan, the use of science to measure progress, and the value for dollars expended. Without a clear commitment to near-term performance measures, the State and others will continue to muddle along on 20-year timelines with few actions and results.

### **Summary**

The near-term strategies outlined in the staff memo are an excellent starting point for discussion. However, new thinking is needed to ensure the State and others establish a new way of implementing projects. The Delta Stewardship Council can use these near-term strategies to reframe the challenges, strategies, governance, and performance to achieve real progress in the immediate future. I look forward to further discussion with you and the Council.